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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a reflecting team work model that helps move a group system through increased process illumination. Grounded in second-order cybernetics and social constructionism, this model emphasizes the group as a linguistic system. In this group setting, language works to co-construct meaning and generate new narratives for client experiences. A protocol is provided for using the reflecting team in the group setting. Principles for language use, landmarks for reflection, and practical procedures for using the reflecting team are detailed. Appropriately used, the reflecting team method can facilitate member recognition of complex group process and move the group away from stalemate towards productive work. Limitations of the model and its application to other settings are included. (Contains 48 references.) (Author/ND)

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Group Process Illuminated: Facilitating the Here-and-Now through the Reflecting Team

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Abstract

This paper presents a reflecting team working model that helps un-stick a stuck group system through increased process illumination. Grounded in second-order cybernetics and social constructionism, this model emphasizes the group as a linguistic system. In this group setting, language works to co-construct meaning and generate new narratives for client experiences.

A protocol is provided for using the reflecting team in the group setting. Principles for language use, landmarks for reflection and practical procedures for applying the reflecting team are detailed. Appropriately used, the reflecting team method can facilitate member recognition of complex group process and move the group away from stagnancy towards productive working. Limitations of the model and its application to other settings are included.

Group Process Illuminated:

Facilitating the Here-and-Now through the Reflecting Team

Have you ever felt stymied about how to propel a sluggish group dynamic forward when other kinds of therapeutic interventions have failed? While here-and-now activation feeds power into the group (Donigian & Malnati, 1997; Yalom, 1985, 1995), it alone can not propel this sluggish group forward. Process illumination must follow here-and-now activation in order for groups to move ahead (Yalom, 1985, 1995). Illuminating complex dynamics between members, leader, and the group is the group therapist's most critical task (Yalom, 1995); if left unexamined or unrecognized, the group process may become bogged down or stuck. While most therapists would agree upon the importance of process recognition, the twists and turns of group dynamics often remain unrecognized by members and inexperienced therapists alike (Luft, 1970). Manifold causes exist: the subtle, implicit, recursive, and complex nature of group interaction renders it illusive to note; intense and immediate experiences prohibit time for reflection; events within the group whirl from one sequence to the next, masking the meaning of interaction; and metacommunication featuring complex group interactions may be difficult to absorb (Luft, 1970). These difficulties in process recognition are compounded by various societal norms (McGuire, 1974; Yalom, 1995) prohibiting overt commentary on interpersonal process.

The consequences of a stuck system can be frustrating for both members and therapists. Feelings of discomfort build as the group spins itself deeper into stalemate. This group impasse occurs most frequently in the storming/transition stage. According to Corey

and Corey (1997), the storming/transition stage is featured by group tension, members' anxiousness, fear of exposure, vying for sense of control, and a host of behaviors stemming from feelings of vulnerability. Because this turbulence arises prior to the maturity of the group's working stage, the therapists may find themselves operating in a highly charged environment. How can they continue to facilitate group cohesiveness and trust while simultaneously breaking the stalemate? Yet, if dynamics are left unillumined, the therapists cannot help members gain the self-awareness necessary for self-knowledge and growth.

Systemic problems need systemic solutions. A blocked system needs a force to propel the recursive dynamics within the system. Literature abounds regarding the application of the reflecting team format as first developed by Norwegian psychiatrist, Tom Anderson, and his colleagues at the Tromso University, Institute for Community Medicine. An outgrowth from the strategic therapy approach promoted by the Milan Associates, the use of the reflecting team has been largely limited to marriage and family therapy (Anderson, 1987). Still, in its limited realm the reflecting team has demonstrated intriguing power in helping systems change (White, 1995). Despite its piquing power, the reflecting team model has not been applied to group work. Virtually no study exists on how the reflecting teams can contribute to group process. This study aims to fill this void by providing a protocol for applying the reflecting team in the group setting. We hope to demonstrate how the reflecting team can act as a neutral force to un-stick a stuck group system through illuminating recursive group process.

Group as a Linguistic System

The question arises: What philosophical bases lead us to believe the reflecting team

can un-stick a stuck group system? We ground our rationale in the theory of second order cybernetics (Bateson, 1972, 1979; Keeney, 1983), the new epistemology of social constructionism (Gergen, 1985, 1994) and postmodernism (Becvar, Canfield, & Becvar, 1997; Hoffman, 1990; Lax, 1992; O'Hara & Anderson, 1991). All of these philosophies emerge in an effort to modify the modernist way of viewing human behavior and change.

The modernist tradition emphasizes universal truths, fixed reality, objectifiable experiences, linear causality, and a decontextualized human mind. This perspective often leads to the individual as the focal point of change (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Rosen, 1996). By contrast post-modernism espouses multiple realities, subjective experiences, recursive causality and contextualized meaning-making. In this framework, the arena for change lies in the interaction between individuals and the world in which they live (Freedman & Combs, 1996; McKenzie & Monk 1997). Second-order cybernetics and social constructionism, falling under the umbrella of postmodern philosophy, share a focus viewing therapy as a reflexive and collaborative venture (Becvar, Canfield, & Becvar, 1997). Each of these philosophies serves to guide this study in building the reflecting team model in group work.

Second-Order Cybernetics Perspectives

To understand second-order cybernetics it is imperative to trace its origin in first-order cybernetics theory. First-order cybernetic theory is a significant movement attempting to challenge the modernist's traditional stance. The word "cybernetics", first introduced by Norbert Wiener (1950), refers to the organization and flow of information processing systems. Cybernetic science studies the movement of information through progressive cycles of detection and correction. Using the metaphor of cybernetics to guide therapeutic thinking,

first order cybernetics theorists look at: interaction patterns in the nested system; reciprocal causality; and recursion (Becvar, Canfield, & Becvar, 1997). The focus shifts from changing the individual to changing the recursive patterns in the interactions of client systems.

Although first-order cybernetic therapists view behaviors as vitally interconnected, they have been critiqued for seeing themselves as separate from the client system (Becvar & Becvar, 1993). Operating as "experts" separate from the client system, they sometimes attempt to provide objective assessment, diagnosis and treatment to intervene in the client's dysfunctional system (Becvar, Canfield, & Becvar, 1997). This suggests an inconsistency with the interconnectedness theory they hold.

Second-order cybernetics theory attempts to modify this inconsistency within first-order therapy. Also called "the cybernetics of cybernetics", second-order thinkers believe that the very act of observing changes both the observer and the observed. Since this approach does not consider the observer as separate from the observed, a therapist cannot stand outside the system to make impartial assessment and implement strategic interventions (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Further, they believe that a therapist assuming the expert position may disempower clients; the therapist as expert implies the client as novice. Based on this belief, second-order therapists seek to be reflexive, collaborative, non-hierarchical, non-objectifying, curious, and respectful (Becvar, Canfield, & Becvar, 1997). Replacing the "diagnosis of dysfunction" with "co-construction and coevolution of options" for client life, this new paradigm shifts clinical focus away from dysfunction and towards personal agency and client competency. Second order cybernetic metaphor may lead us to a new therapeutic

language and a less controlling clinical thinking (Auerswald, 1987; Bogdan, 1985; Bateson, 1972, 1979).

Group As a Cybernetic System

The group is a system in its own right. Both first and second order cybernetic theories define the group as a self-regulating social system featured by: member interaction; feedback patterns; circular loops; emphasis on present patterns of interaction; and repeating patterns of interaction (Becvar, Canfield, & Becvar, 1997; Luft, 1970). However, because first order cybernetic theorists see the therapist as separate from the group system, their focus is on the formation of detached assessment and strategized solutions. These fixed strategies may constrain clients and therapists from seeing potential options lying outside the route of that fixed specific goal.

Conversely, second cybernetics view the therapist as part of the system and place the greatest source of influence within each member. As an interwoven system, group reality is an interactional, rather than an intrapsychic phenomenon (Monk, Drewery, & Winslade, 1997). Problems exist within the interaction, not within the individual. Therefore, we take the position that group therapists and group members co-construct what happens in the change process, each mutually influencing the other (Andersen, 1991).

Group as a Linguistic System

Social constructionism echoes the vision of the group as a social creation in constant flux over time. As a social creation, language is a defining framework for member experience; language can be the problem, and at the same time, the solution (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). If the group keeps talking about the problem, they may maintain the

problem. A change in language, however, can lead to a change in member experiences. Therefore, we conceive of the group as a linguistic system with language playing a critical role in how members generate meaning from group experiences (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Coale, 1992; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Lax, 1992).

Language resonating the philosophy of multiple reality can facilitate opening of client options (Gergen & Kaye, 1992; Hoffman, 1990; O'Hara & Anderson, 1991). Therefore, in group practice it is helpful for language to emphasize an attitude of: tentativeness vs. certainty; curiosity vs. expert knowledge; and alternative description vs. singular and linear interpretation. This socially constructed view of group reality attempts to open space for more egalitarian relationships in therapy. Picturing the group through the lens of second-order cybernetics, social constructionism and postmodernism, this study proposes a reflecting team model to un-stick the stuck group system via process illumination. We believe that when group process is illuminated through the reflecting team, group members are more likely to extract meanings and insights from the here-and-now interaction and the group will move forward.

Protocol of the Model

Principles of Reflecting Team Language

When a group is "stuck", it craves fresh and liberating ideas in order to advance. The reflecting team can bring new perspectives to illuminate complex group process, thus thrusting forward a once stagnant group system. But how? The key lies in the linguistic system. The meaning-creating ability of language shapes members' future thoughts and interactions (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). Since language is a defining framework for

member experience, the language used by the reflecting team plays a critical role in influencing members' experiences. If deficiency or problem focused language is used, the reflecting team could bring more blockage to group members. Given the defining power of language in the group system, we offer the following principles for the reflecting team while languaging during the reflecting process:

Tentativeness vs. Certainty

Team members use "tentative" language as an agent to activate clients' sense of expertness (Anderson, 1991; Lax, 1992). If the team is not tentative, they run the risk of sounding like experts who have solutions rather than alternative views. This could be especially dangerous because many members may take what the reflecting team says as "the truth" rather than as subjective observations. Therefore, it is important that the team use tentative language, such as "I wonder if..." "I'm curious about..." "Perhaps.." "Maybe..." The reflecting team's tentativeness invites group members to move away from their fixed characterizations about themselves and other group members, freeing their perceptions. In this way the group dynamics are also freed. For example:

Rather than saying "Janet looks bored tonight," the reflecting team would reflect with tentativeness,

> *"I wonder* how Janet is feeling while sitting in the session? *I am curious* about how she might seem to others?"

"Both/And vs Either/Or"

During the session, "both/and" reflections take the place of "either/or" commentaries (Anderson, 1991). Many clients have been socialized to follow either/or logic, leading to restricted vision. The reflecting team can expand this restricted vision by engaging in

both/and conversation. This method augments the idea of tentativeness above. The reflecting team's use of both/and works to facilitate group members to shift from a dichotomous thought pattern towards a liberating multi-dimensional perspective. An illustration of both/and reflecting follows:

Reflecting team member "A" reflects: "I am struck by the way the group confronted Jerry." Member "B" does not choose to say, "*Yes, but* I think the group is really trying to show concern towards Jerry." Instead, she might say:

> "I hear your observation that the session was overwhelmed with confrontation towards Jerry, *and I also* sensed deep caring from the group towards Jerry."

Presenting a smorgasbord of ideas

The spirit of reflecting is not to "bridge differences" but to "open up more options" (Cantwell & Holms, 1994, p. 24). Therefore, it may be helpful for reflecting team members to "bounce ideas around" in a smorgasbord fashion (Lax, 1991). Reflections are used as a springboard for generating more meanings rather than "facts" about group reality. This may stimulate the member to experience group process as flowing, complex, vital, and multi-dimensional.

Team member "A" opts not to say, "I noticed that Dina looked insecurely down at the floor throughout the session." Rather, he might say:

> "I *noticed* that Dina has been looking down at the floor, and *I am wondering* what she might being feeling? Does she feel like being quiet today? *Or* is she meditative? Is she tired? *Or perhaps* sad?"

This smorgasbord of ideas works to catalyze alternative meanings and connections. For example, the reflection above may trigger team member "B" to comment:

> "Oh, yes, I remember Dina mentioned earlier that she is worried about her meeting

with her father."

Internalizing Humble Talk

Speaking humbly encourages the spirit of collaboration in therapy. When the team has internalized an unpresumptuous position, humble talk will flow. Attempting not to project themselves as knowing better than the group members, the team's unassuming demeanor is more conducive to opening-up rather than shutting-down the group dynamic. One way to show humbleness is to keep the reflections concise and brief (Cantwell & Holms, 1994). Statements need only be long enough to make a striking point. In a further gesture of modesty the reflecting team may offer the group members the opportunity to "turn away" or not listen during the reflecting process. Everyday language is used in lieu of technical jargon. Adopting this humble position enhances group willingness to share their inner reactions here-to-for hidden. Group process is, therefore, elucidated.

For example, a reflecting team member would decide not to say: "I observed carefully and I understand exactly what happen between Gerald and Jane." Instead, the team member might want to say,

> "This reflection is only speculation. Perhaps Jane felt hesitant when speaking to Gerald because of his comments about her being a housewife."

Constructive vs. Pathologizing Language

In an attempt not to transport analytical or diagnostic language into their reflections, the team tries to avoid language implying presuppositions of client deficit (Kuehlwein, 1996). Rather, the team strives to use constructive language, carefully abstaining from words with negative connotations (Biever & Gardner, 1995). When framed in this constructive fashion, the reflections heighten member receptivity to the message. However, constructive language

is not just positive thinking or affirmation. As Cantwell and Holmes (1995) warn us, "affirmations that are too positive can also leave the client an impression of not being heard, of client's struggle not being appreciated, or the client's pain not being attended to" (p. 41). Thus, the reflection is most helpful when it says difficult things, but in a language that leads to expanded options.

How can one say difficult things in a language that leads to expansion of options? There are two ways. First, the team can provide perspectives which are unusual, but not too unusual. Anderson (1991) describes unusual reflections as:

> "so much unusual that it represents a surprise. Not necessarily a sweet surprise. But so much a surprise that the persons are given a possibility to be moved to another position and from there leave out of and/or add something to the descriptions they had before" (p. 67).

The unusualness of the reflection liberates members from fixed thinking, expanding their vision for alternative narratives. For example, the reflecting team avoids a too ordinary comment: "I wonder what Mary could do to let go of her need to protect others at her own expense?" Instead, an unusual reflection is used:

> "I am curious about what the members could do to provoke Mary to stand up for herself, and how might Mary feel in response to this?"

The second way one can say difficult things in a language leading to expansion of options is to use "problem externalization" (White, 1984, 1989a, 1989b) and "personification of the problem" (Griffith & Griffith, 1994). Problem externalization acts as an antidote to the pathologizing process of social labelling, seeing problems as problems rather than people as problems. The team achieves problem externalization by giving members' problems a fitting name (ie., the voice of self-contempt), placing the words "the" or "a" before the

problem (ie., the bulimia), and then mapping the influence of the problem. Personification of problems involves representing the problem with human abilities (ie., the voice of self-doubt recruits Marlene...). An example of problem externalization and personification follows:

> "I am amazed in seeing how *the voice of self-contempt* has *enticed* Jane *into* putting herself down when other group members give her positive feedback."

While we give a brief example here, we recommend the reading of White (1989, 1990) and Griffith and Griffith (1994) before employing these principles.

Unshutting the Unspeakable

A culprit blocking a fluid group system may hide in the darkness with the unspoken. One misconception about the reflecting team is that it avoids tough talk (Cantwell & Holms, 1995). Actually, the reflecting team thrives on "unshutting the unspeakable." The "unspeakable" is any difficult topic which threatens members' or group vulnerabilities. In addressing difficult topics in a way that generates new meanings, palpable tension bogging down the group system can be averted.

For example, in lieu of saying, "I appreciate how Michael offered solutions to Mary's divorce dilemma," the reflecting team might reflect:

> "It is interesting to notice that when Michael talks about Mary's dilemma, he seems intellectual and impersonal. I wonder if this content-focused style helps Michael dodge the pain about his divorce? Or, perhaps it helps him bypass the feelings about the recent loss of his father?"

Letting the Soundlessness Speak

There is a good reason for calling the team a "reflecting" team: it is a team which reflects and models reflecting behaviors. A group member may not benefit from a new idea

if it speeds by in a flurry. Therefore, after a striking or unusual comment the reflecting team may allow a few seconds of silence to unfold, granting group members space to ruminate upon it.

For example, while making a reflection, one team member offers:

> "I wonder what it was like for Gerald to sit in the group and listen to so much talk about death and loss in light of his father's recent death?" (a few seconds of silence follows)

The reflecting team pausing for 5 seconds in a respectful silence allows group members, especially Gerald, to take in and feel the impact of the statement. This moment might have been lost if another reflecting team member immediately chimed in with a new thought.

What to Reflect?

The principles above seek to add power to change the group system by injecting a new discourse into the stagnant system. The reflecting team can enhance this power by focusing their listening and reflecting on certain landmarks. What the team chooses to reflect on, and not to reflect on, can have an influence on the essence of the dialogues that follow. If the team focuses on individual members' problems, they may inadvertently hold onto attempted solutions that may limit options (Becvar, Canfield, & Becvar, 1997).

Keeping this in mind, the reflecting team directs their listening and reflecting on the following landmarks:

<u>Members' Patterns and Impacts</u>

When listening, the reflecting team pays attention to group dynamics, meta-communications, here-and-now interactions, and members' narratives that are especially striking. The team then can reflect on the members' interpersonal patterns of interaction and

the impact of those patterns on others, especially those that lead to a stalemate in the group. Members are more able to change once their own fixed patterns are reflected on by the team (Merl, 1995). For example:

> "I am curious about how Josh's habits of giving Linda unsolicited advice may impact Linda's withdrawal from their interaction?"

It is only with Josh's awareness that there is even the possibility for his creating new narrative endings.

Members' Movement Towards Goals

Archaeologists dig for artifacts to re-construct a way of life. We believe the reflecting team can act as group archeologist by choosing to unearth successes and changes leading members towards their desired goals. This can be done by excavating the small steps members took while progressing towards their goals. The team acknowledges group members' difficulty and then their success in overcoming the difficulty (Neal, 1996). For example, initially team member "A" remarks:

> "Steve seems to so *much more able to* reach out and really connect with people."

Later on team member "B" notes:

> "Steve is growing in his ability to take feedback really well *compared to* last session."

And again:

> "Steve *is now growing in his ability* to take what he has learned in the group and apply it with people outside the group. I see him now taking the here-and-now techniques of being alive at the moment in his conversation with people rather than intellectualizing."

Finally, the team notes:

> "Steve *met an important goal towards* gaining intimacy with people *when he was able*

to go home after the session and question himself about how he was inviting others to see him as impenetrable."

The reflecting team can also track the group's movement toward collective goals:

"I am excited by the way the group *is now able to* move away from "safe topics" *towards* taking risks by confronting difficulties in group process."

Members' "Unique Outcomes"

We believe the reflecting team can help members redraft their perceptions by choosing to reflect on their current "unique outcomes" (White, 1989). In the group context unique outcomes are exceptions from fixed patterns. The reflecting team can punctuate members' emergence of their desired selves. Sometimes members are so caught up in their problems that they do not see what kind of interpersonal competency their hearts' desire. The reflecting team can reflect on members' *preferred* styles of interaction and how this ideal style can beget the emergent self. This focus reinforces the notion that paying attention to members' new directions can have a generative affect: The team can accentuate unique outcomes by reflecting unnoticed exceptions from members' patterns. Unrecognized inner agency grows as exceptions from patterns are acknowledged. For example:

"I am dazzled! Just the way Kerri's tears struck out against the difficulty of speaking up for her feelings before the group."

While members' tears are often noticed, they may be overlooked as a unique outcome. In Kerri's case above, the opportunity for Kerri to experience her tears as empowering may have been missed if the connection between the tears and the fixed pattern were omitted.

The Contextualized Self

The reflecting team can promote members' self-insight by contextualizing their issues. This helps members de-pathologize themselves. The team can acknowledge how social and

political realities influence group members by tying human behaviors to societal context. In doing so, the team invites members to consider how their life circumstance exacerbate their adversities. For example,

> "I am curious about how *society's view of feminine beauty* may influence Ashley's appeal to the bulimia."

Procedures

Before the reflecting team meets the group members, the therapist briefly introduces the team and describes their function for the group. Following the procedure below may help therapists apply the reflecting team to their group practice:

Mid-Session Procedure

Taking a Listening Position. During the session the reflecting team sits in the periphery of the room while the group members and therapists conduct their group in the center of the room. The first step is to listen without preconceived notions about how the group should work. The second step is for the team members to be cognizant of how they impact the group members simply by being in the room. Because we do not advocate the use of a one-way-mirror between the group and the reflecting team, the team should stay as unobtrusive as possible. This sensitivity can be enacted as the reflecting team listens without exchanging eye contact or whispering with each other. Note-taking also can distract the group from their uninhibited, spontaneous here-and-now interaction. Note-taking may also inhibit the team itself from internally "letting go" and exploring new options; the reflecting team may tend to feel either enamored and/or trapped by the fixed ideas in their written notes.

The Reflecting Team in Dialogue During the group session the reflecting team may take the initiative, suggesting that it is a good time to pause for reflection. If the members

and therapists agree, the team proceeds. Similarly, group therapists may request reflections from the team at any time, and may feel free to request the team's reflections more than one time during the session. This option is especially helpful in instances when therapists feel confused about where next to proceed. This offers a liberating alternative for the temporarily tongue-tied therapist. When a therapist reaches such an impasse, one of the reflecting team members can interview the therapist about the session in front of the group. This can be done by the team interviewing from the center of the group, asking such circular questions as:

> "What concerns led you to want to discuss this topic at this moment?"
>
> "What understanding or explanations do you have about this dilemma?" (Davidson & Lussardi, 1991, p 150).

After this interview the reflecting team reflects in the inner circle, while the therapist and the members listen in the outside circle.

Before offering reflections the team makes two acknowledgements. First, they admit that their reflections cannot avoid internal subjective editing. Next, the team offers the group the options of either listening to the reflections, or else, to simply float with their own thoughts. These acknowledgements exhibit an attitude of respectfulness towards the members, as well as a sense that the reflecting team acts as participant-observers, not experts. While offering their own reflections, the team does not speak to the members or the therapists. Instead, they speak and make eye-contact only with each other. This behavior allows more space for members to engage in their own inner dialogues.

Ending Reflecting Team Conversation. The therapist can signal for the team conversation to end while the team is still talking. This entices an open-ended atmosphere,

signalling that there is still a lot more yet to be said.

Resuming Group Session. Members and therapists now go back to sit in the inner circle and the reflecting team resumes their original place outside the circle. Then the group session resumes.

Members Reflecting on Team's Reflection. Therapists can ask questions to facilitate members reflection on the reflecting team's reflection. Some of these questions may include:

"Were there particular ideas that were most striking to you?"

"What reflections were most helpful to you?"

"What new perspectives are open to you through the team's reflections?"

"Was there anything you wish the team had not said?"

"Was there anything you wish to add to their reflections?"

If time permits, give all members a chance to respond. If time does not allow, then keep the comments short. After the members finish their comments on the reflecting team's reflection, therapists may briefly add their own ideas evoked from the reflecting team. However, the last comment or last work belong to the group therapist and the members. The group session then continues to address members' agenda.

Post-Session Reflection

If the mid-session reflections have not been requested, then only post-session reflections will be offered. Post-session reflections are similar to mid-session reflections, with only minor differences. Mid-session reflections are offered most often in response to an impasse bogging down a session, while post-session reflections are offered at the conclusion

of a session. These post-session reflections address the session more holistically.

Post-session reflection starts by noting striking interactions occurring during the session (Anderson, 1992). A team member may reflect with something like, "When I heard...," or "When John was confronting Evelyn about her evasiveness, I thought I saw ..."

After the therapist signals for reflections to end, members are again invited to respond. There may be more time in the post-session response period for the members, and group therapists can precipitate member response by inviting more than one member to address the same question. After the group's responses are exhausted, the therapist may then introduce a connecting question. Along with the questions provided in the "responding to team's reflection" section, the following questions may provide helpful options:

> "Was there anything that you disagree with, or that you wish the reflecting team had phrased in a different way?"
>
> "If you could rewind the reflection session and then play it back in slow motion, what would you see differently?"
>
> "If you could create a metaphor about how you were affected by the team's reflection, what would it be?"
>
> "What you think might happen differently in our next group session because of this reflecting session?"

After members finish their comments, therapists can add their own ideas evoked from the both the reflecting teams' and the members' comments.

Discussion

A system in a standstill needs refreshing ideas to steer the group forward, and this is what the reflecting team instills. The reflections promote the vision of alternative realities,

emphasize the recursive interaction of the group, facilitate clinical transparency, and highlight context over content. Moving the group away from focus on individual deficiency, the team stresses how interactional patterns influence the group. Via this dynamic intervention, the reflecting team illumines complex group process, making the once obscure dynamics visible.

Benefit for the Group Members

Flowing between alternative descriptions and renditions, group members may discover new possibilities for meaning. These new meanings can be obtained as the thought processes of the reflecting team are made transparent before the group members' eyes (Lax, 1995; White, 1993, 1995). The effort of becoming more transparent grants the group members "a backstage pass to the inner workings of a large society of professionals" (Lax, 1995, p. 149). As Griffith and Griffith (1995) note, it makes clinical thinking "clearly visible, deconstructing the professional knowledge and practice" (P. 98). As a result, complex group process is elucidated.

Further, this model allows room for many ideas to be expressed by all parties, thereby honoring various perspectives as equally valid and potentially useful to the group (Davidson & Lassardi, 1991). This works towards a deconstruction of power differentiation in the counseling relationship. Once invited to contribute their feedback to the group, the members feel more included and visible. Simultaneously, the tendency of group members to view the reflecting team as experts is lessened (Anderson & Swim, 1995; Davidson & Lassardi, 1991). The reflecting team also provides a particular audience, adding power to the members' new narrative. Finally, the languaging of the reflecting team has a modeling

effect on members. As group members repeatedly hear the team's inclusive conversation, they may choose to adopt this language into their own personal lives. In this way the reflecting team format offers a natural, comfortable and empowering experience for group members. When the clients listen to the team converse about their interactions, the new perspectives empower them to change (Davidson & Lassardi, 1991). As group members note:

> "I love the reflecting team! The whole concept fascinates me. I was surprised when they were called in to reflect in mid-session. It was very helpful for all of us to become aware of the dynamics they noticed right at that moment."
>
> "The reflecting team really seems to pinpoint the dynamics of the group. It was enlightening when they noticed my lack of trust for my own feelings - something that was not noticed by the members."
>
> "I like very much the whole concept of the reflecting team! I TRULY had no idea what to expect from them, but I was pleasantly surprised. I like the format of dialoguing that they use. Their use of language really struck me, especially comments such as: 'I was struck by...' 'I got the feeling that...' 'I sensed that...' 'Did you pick up on that...?'"
>
> "Their reflections were unbiased. Because they weren't group members, they could be honest and not worry about offending anyone. I especially like the fact that they frequently see things from different angles. We all benefited from hearing the supporting arguments from various sides."
>
> "As I sit and listen to the reflecting team, I keep saying in my mind, 'Wow, I missed that!'"

Benefit for the Therapists

The reflecting team model strives to offer the once tongue-tied group therapists a much needed resource for generating new ideas that move the group forward. The therapist may learn vicariously while witnessing the reflecting team working first hand, a critical element for the growth of the therapist (Landis & Young, 1994). As Davidson and Lassardi

(1991) indicate, it is not sufficient for therapists to merely read about how second order cybernetics and postmodernism work in group. Experiential learning is needed. Witnessing the reflecting team in action provides therapists a live illustration of how these ideas operate. Another benefit is that therapists leave the session with more open-mindedness and fresh perspectives about members (Davidson & Lassardi, 1991). As group therapists note:

> "At the moment when the reflecting team stepped in, I was really feeling tangled in a catch 22 situation. So, the reflecting team offered me a much needed time-out from the group process. I learned from listening to the language the reflecting team used to help move the group forward. It was like viewing a derailed train being put back on its track."
>
> "Since the two reflecting team members did not look at the group or at me while reflecting, it gave me further incentives to reflect on the insight they gave. Through their transparency, I was able to see the group members with a fresh perspective. I thought to myself, 'This is great!'"

Future Considerations

While the reflecting team has attracted extensive research regarding family and marriage therapy, virtually no study exists on how the reflecting team can be used in groups. To fill this gap this article provides group practitioners with theory, principles, and practical applications for using the reflecting team towards unsticking a stuck group system. In this regard we believe our reflecting team model sets possible groundwork for new thinking on process illumination in group therapy. We hope group therapists find this model inspiring for their daily clinical practice.

Several considerations, however, need forethought. Financial reality might limit the use of reflecting team to one or two sessions. Also, team members must have adequate training and practice. With this in mind, the reflecting team model proposed by this study has great applicability to other settings that will benefit from process illumination, including:

mediation, negotiation, supervision, and training. The model we provide in this study can lead researchers into vast uncharted territories, rich with possibility. It is critical that further inquiry and research follow to investigate its effect on group work.

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